

**PALM SUNDAY:
“A KING ARRIVES”
(Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, John 12)**
4.10.22

INTRODUCTION

We’re going to be taking a two-Sunday break from the teaching and healing ministry of our “radical rabbi” to focus on the ultimate meaning of his coming to earth — to offer his life as a sacrifice for our sins. And while there is text to read and comments to make, in so many ways, this is trying to put words to something that is so far beyond human speech and even human comprehension that, with every time I consider this story, I realize just how beyond me this all is. So pray for me as I lead us on this amazing two-week, three-service journey — this morning, Maundy Thursday night at 7, and next week with Easter Sunday — where we will see the impossible become possible — sinners offered a chance for reconciliation with a holy, perfect God that will allow for a relationship and a life with him that will never, ever end. So as we take these first steps, **let’s start off with a word of prayer.**

TEXTS

The stories of Holy Week are faithfully reported by Matthew (an eyewitness), Mark (who is thought to have received his information from Peter, also an eyewitness), Luke (an investigative journalist and historian who would have received his information from many people, including the apostle Paul), and John (he also an eyewitness) — and all of these directed in their writings by the Holy Spirit. So I’ll be doing my best to sort of “marry” these stories together into one narrative.

But I should also explain that we are going to be sharing in the telling of this story in an interactive sort of way. I’m going to be asking you all to dive into your imagination by asking each of you to put yourself in Christ’s sandals in the telling of this story to allow us to get some sort of sense as to what he might have been feeling inside even as he is having these outward experiences.

Now this approach is completely valid; remember what the author of Hebrews told us: *Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity . . . He was made like them, fully human in every way — Hebrews 2:14a, 17a.* In other words, Jesus had feelings; things made him smile or laugh, things caught his eye and made impressions.

Now don’t worry; I won’t be asking any of you all any direct questions, but I will ask for your direct participation through your mind, through the filter of your imagination. What do you think it might have been like to be Jesus on this day? What thoughts do you imagine Jesus might have had as he watched today’s events come to pass? How might he have been viewing the people he saw? What would he have seen in the reactions of his disciples? So today, join me in imagining you are Jesus of Nazareth as we take this special journey into Jerusalem. So let’s start this amazing day.

You have been ministering all over Judea and Galilee for over three years, bringing an incredibly powerful preaching, teaching and healing ministry that people have never witnessed before. For a little while now you have been heading south from Galilee toward Jerusalem, the most important city on earth for all Jews, the home of the greatest temple in Judaism, and at this moment the site of the festival of Passover — possibly the fourth one you have observed while you have been active in ministry. The days have gradually been getting warmer as spring has taken hold in Judea; the average temp for this time of year in Jerusalem is 70°. There are only a couple days of rain on average in April, so the chances are pretty good that you'll be spending this day in sunshine. Now, in a few moments, you will be sitting on the back of a young donkey, one never ridden before and, as you begin this ride, you will become surrounded by a mass of people coming out to greet you — and there we begin: *As [Jesus and his disciples] approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her [which no one has ever ridden — Mark 11:2b]. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away — Matthew 21:1-3.*

Because this colt has never had a rider before, the mother donkey comes along as well; her accompaniment will allow the younger one to remain settled, which will be important as the chaos of a growing crowd adds to the newness of being ridden for the first time.

And sure enough: *Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as [Jesus] had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it" — Luke 19:32-34.* And, as Mark tells it, *[The disciples] answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go — Mark 11:6.*

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet [Zechariah]: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" [At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things (written by the prophets) had been written about him and that these things had been done to him — John 12:16.] The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on — Matthew 21:4-7 (quoting Zechariah 9:9).

There is so much focus on the Jewish design of a Messiah that they completely overlook God's design of a Messiah. The usual conqueror gaining territory by force of arms is replaced by another kind of hero: As God says so clearly in the very next verse in Zechariah's prophetic vision: *"I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" — God speaking, Zechariah 9:10.* There is another battle to be won, another kingdom to be established and another peace to be found — an inner peace, a spiritual peace, that will be far more eternally important than any rebellion against occupying armies and more eternally lasting than any empire of earthly glory.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. [When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for

all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” — Luke 19:37-38.] The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! [quoting from Psalm 118:25-26]” [“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” — Mark 11:10.] [“Blessed is the king of Israel” — John 12:13b.] “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” — Matthew 21:8-9.

Cloaks would be getting a workout on this day. The disciples placed their cloaks on the donkey for Jesus to sit on. And the crowd would be spreading their cloaks in the road for the donkeys to walk on. From ancient times, the spreading of cloaks on the road, along with the cutting down and spreading of palm branches, was a traditional way of welcoming kings fresh from victorious battle; in fact, the palm branches were a specific acknowledgement of the presence of royalty. Now of course, on this day, there is no military triumph to celebrate, yet there seems an undeniable sense of “royalty” in this procession. And why not? You have been teaching about another kingdom, the kingdom of your Father, for over three years now. So it seems only fitting that, on this day, you are being welcomed as a king — a king who rules from a foundation of peace and humility over a kingdom which will have no end, and a king who has expressed an unfathomable love to all through both your words and your works.

And now — listen. This growing crowd is calling out some amazing things. But there is great irony found in the meaning of the Hebrew term you are hearing shouted over and over again: “Hosanna.” This word was actually a pleading to the Lord, meaning, “God, save” or “God, save us!” The irony is that the name given to a baby boy born in Bethlehem some 33 years ago was “Jesus” (“Iesous” (ee-ay-sooce^)) in the Greek or “Yeshuwa” (yah-shoo^-ah) in the Hebrew) — all meaning “God is salvation” or, more commonly, “the Lord saves.”

And along with “Hosanna” are phrases being shouted out that bring Messianic hopes and promises to mind: (1) Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, (2) Hosanna to the Son of David and (3) Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David (both acknowledging the Messiah’s human lineage), and (4) Blessed is the king of Israel.

But then you will do something completely out of character for a triumphant ruler: *[As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept (meaning to sob, to wail loudly) over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” — Luke 19:41-44.]* No one understands; I mean, this parade or welcome or whatever is in your honor. Listen to the things they are calling you: King, Son of David. All that honor — and you’re crying? What’s up with that? But funny thing — no one in the crowd seems mad at you. It seems to be communicated, somehow, that you are showing a passion for the city that only you seem to understand, with a vision into a future that, somehow, you already see.

Some in the crowd are reminded of another time you reacted to Jerusalem in the same way, saying at that time: *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to*

you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” — Jesus Christ, Luke 13:34. No matter what the leadership seems to say about you, or tries to do to you, there seems a love within you that nothing can take away.

But eventually this royal procession continues: *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” [Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him — John 12:17-18] — Matthew 21:10-11.*

You probably don’t let it show, but you are struck by the fact that, while you are relatively well known in Galilee, here in Judea and Jerusalem, the cultural and religious center of all Judaism, to a sizable segment of the population you are still a stranger; after all the things you’ve said and all the things you’ve done, to too many people, you are still a stranger.

So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” — John 12:19.

The harder they try to stop him, the harder it becomes to defeat him.

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written [by the prophet Isaiah],” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it [as Jeremiah wrote] ‘a den of robbers.’” [His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me” — John 2:17 (quoting Psalm 69:9).] — Matthew 21:12-13 (quoting Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11).

You remember doing this three years before. But obviously no hearts or minds had been changed by your actions. But what nobody can even begin to realize is the “why” — why you are so passionate about the temple compound, so possessive of its reputation. If it is true that, *“Before Abraham was born, I AM” — Jesus Christ, John 8:58b*, then it is also true that, as the thoughts begin rising in your mind, “Before this temple came into being, I AM! I was here. When David collected the nation’s riches for the temple, I was here. When the stones were laid one on top of another, I was here. When the curtains were put into place, when all the magnificent furnishings were molded into shape, I was here. When the altars were built, when the columns began to rise, I was here. And when Solomon finished praying to dedicate the temple, and when *fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple [, when] [t]he priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it [,w]hen all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, [when] they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever” — II Chronicles 7:1b-3*, I was here. I beheld that glory because that glory was me! Don’t ever wonder about my zeal for my Father’s house. *“He who has seen me has seen the Father” — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.* I was here!” But then, as people are trying to grasp what they are seeing from you, you move on.

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. [“Teacher, rebuke your disciples” — Luke 19:39b.] “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read [from David’s psalm], ‘From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?” [“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” — Luke 19:40.] And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night — Matthew 21:14-17.

Jesus was going to receive his due this day — the worship and praise that were rightfully his. This was a witness to everybody gathered that day that they recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was so much more than an unconventional rabbi or controversial theologian. He was in fact all those things that people had been calling out to him — the son of David, the one who is king, the one who comes in the name of the Lord, the one who is ruler of Israel. And absolutely nothing in heaven or earth was going to quiet those voices, was going to quiet those truths.

[Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words — Luke 19:47-48.]

APPLICATION

One more reality to join with your imagination, and it’s this: This time, as you have made your entry into Jerusalem, you, Jesus of Nazareth, absolutely know what is going to happen to you over the course of the next several days; in fact, you have been mentioning it for quite a while:

- 1) Toward the very beginning of your ministry, when you meet with the Pharisee Nicodemus, you tell him: ***“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” — Jesus Christ, John 3:14-15.***
- 2) One time when the Pharisees and teachers of the law ask you for some kind of a sign to prove who you are, you tell them: ***“[A]s Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:40.***
- 3) Once you have ID’d yourself to your disciples, you tell them (on multiple occasions that, as Matthew records it: ***From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life — Matthew 16:21.***
- 4) And now, looking ahead from this very festival that we have been talking about, following your triumphal entry into Jerusalem, John tells us that you share with Philip and Andrew: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. . . . Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour” — Jesus Christ, John 12:23-25, 27.***

- 5) And when you begin to pray your “high priestly prayer” in the Garden of Gethsemane, you will start out with these words: ***“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” — Jesus Christ, John 17:1b.***
- 6) And at your arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Peter tries to defend you, you will command him: ***“Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” — Jesus Christ, John 18:11.*** Or as Matthew tells it: ***“Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 26:52-54.***

BOTTOM LINE: You know what is going to happen. You always have!

So let’s create another picture, maybe a more personal picture, of what this kind of day could look like if we were Jesus today: Imagine that you are out in our church parking lot. You are going to walk into church. Problem: Every person in church absolutely hates your guts, to the point that they want to hurt you and physically harm you and humiliate you and, eventually if they get their wish, kill you. You could stay out, and stay away from such a terrible, hate-filled place. But you can’t: You love these people and know that, in some way, your being hurt and even killed by them will give them an opportunity to become one of God’s kids. So even though you know that there is no coming out alive, you walk in anyway. Something more important than your own health and well-being is at stake here — God’s plan of salvation. And his plan is more important than anything else.

CONCLUSION

So picture yourself as Jesus, going from here to here — knowing two things: (1) It is absolutely going to happen, and (2) it is absolutely all for us, simply to give us the chance to know his Father as ours. So what’s that feel like? Let’s pray!